

5X5

Five by Five:

Contemporary Artists on Contemporary Art

April 18–July 5, 2002

Reed Anderson

Christopher Wool

Rina Banerjee

Donald Lipski

Susan Graham

Charles Ray

Ryan Humphrey

Tom Sachs

Larry Krone

Mike Kelley

WHITNEY

Whitney Museum of American Art
at Philip Morris

Five by Five: Contemporary Artists on Contemporary Art

features new works commissioned from five contemporary artists alongside five contemporary works from the Whitney's permanent collection. Each invited artist was asked to select a contemporary work (1985–present) that he or she found personally important or influential, and then to create a work inspired by that piece. The title of the exhibition comes from a radio communiqué that numerically describes the strength and clarity of radio reception, “five by five” being the equivalent of “loud and clear.” The phrase—which refers to a situation that is both complicated and changeable—recently reappeared in New York youth slang, creating a contemporary condition grounded in history. *Five by Five* visually creates a recent historical context for contemporary art while presenting a diverse and multilayered dialogue on what “contemporary” can mean.

Reed Anderson, *The Untitled Fear Piece*, 2002. Airbrushed acrylic, rolled acrylic, and collage on paper, 73 3/4 x 38 1/8 in. (187.3 x 96.8 cm). Collection of the artist; courtesy Clementine Gallery, New York

on
Christopher Wool, *Untitled*, 1990. Alkyd on paper, 73 3/4 x 38 1/8 in. (187.3 x 96.8 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase, with funds from the Thomas Fountain Purchase Fund and the Drawing Committee go.20



I gravitated toward Chris Wool's work knowing the whole body of it, the text pieces and the abstract pattern paintings. In my process, I am interested in how the original images, found or drawn, translate into patterning and abstraction—and selecting a word piece, not a pattern piece, seemed more challenging. Though seemingly dissimilar to my work, Chris Wool walks a similar tightrope to the one I also walk, between the simultaneously mechanized and the handmade.

The way I punch holes in paper is a very mechanical process. I began thinking about the relationship of this process to typing and the typewriter, or even the very physical mark-making of early writing on walls or clay tablets—a kind of writing that is also image. Creating my “writing” through its own printing process—by folding the piece and adding paint—it becomes similar to mimeography, which was my first recollection of the written word.

My process is a balance of opposites: the sitting down and punching is much more psychologically free than the planning. As I work, a rhythm develops, a beat, like tapping out a message in Morse code. It becomes a mantra, and the drawings a form of meditation. Because the pieces look so mechanical, it is interesting to have this other spiritual element within the drawing.

The Untitled Fear Piece is a text drawing in some respects, adhering to the guidelines that have been set up by studying the Wool piece. The paper is the same size, and I've measured all the letters and spaces exactly—working off that to create the new drawing. It's good to understand all the rules before not playing by them. Normally where I would airbrush pigment through the punched holes, I used a primarily monochromatic rolled paint, which I had tried in frustration on a previous piece. When I opened up that piece, all the intricacies and lacelike details were there, but they were thick and smudged where the paint was pushed through the holes. My friend said it looked like a beautiful woman who had been out all night, her makeup smeared. I like that bleeding through, like cheap printing—again the mechanical with the trace of the hand. I always like to throw off the symmetry because I think that symmetry is a little bit dull, too pretty.

Also relevant to my work is that Wool's piece is backward and flipped, though I didn't realize that from the slide at first. It was a shock to see it in person—it related immediately to the flip-and-fold thing that I do. For me, the flip drawings are the simultaneous existence of one object in the path of the other. I read a book on time travel that suggested a time-space leap can be created by actually folding time and space, creating the coexistence of two times—both the present and the past. We are both the thief and royalty of simultaneity.

—Drawn from an interview with the artist, February 22, 2002

Our nation, the Global Garden, is a centralized place, determined to bring the Other back here to domesticate it. This space imposes an unnatural verticality; while our fences may be drawn high, they are perforated and permit access to the Out There. Our architecture skillfully penetrates the skies, yet we cannot see beyond the grounds of its towers. It is this limited vision that betrays us—surprises us with our vulnerability to the world at large.

It is the impulse of the twentieth century to unify and homogenize our multiple pasts into a single linear narrative. The spirit of our nation, in particular, calls for the diplomatic articulation of difference, replicating the unpleasant hierarchies of colonial rule. The American flag is now more than ever hyper-visible in this nation, playing multiple roles. It can signify a personal expression of individuality associated with all

Rina Banerjee, *A Stranger Is in Our Paradise*,

Ours is a fortunate place, the Best Island, and the center of an unknowing, unmeasured world at large.

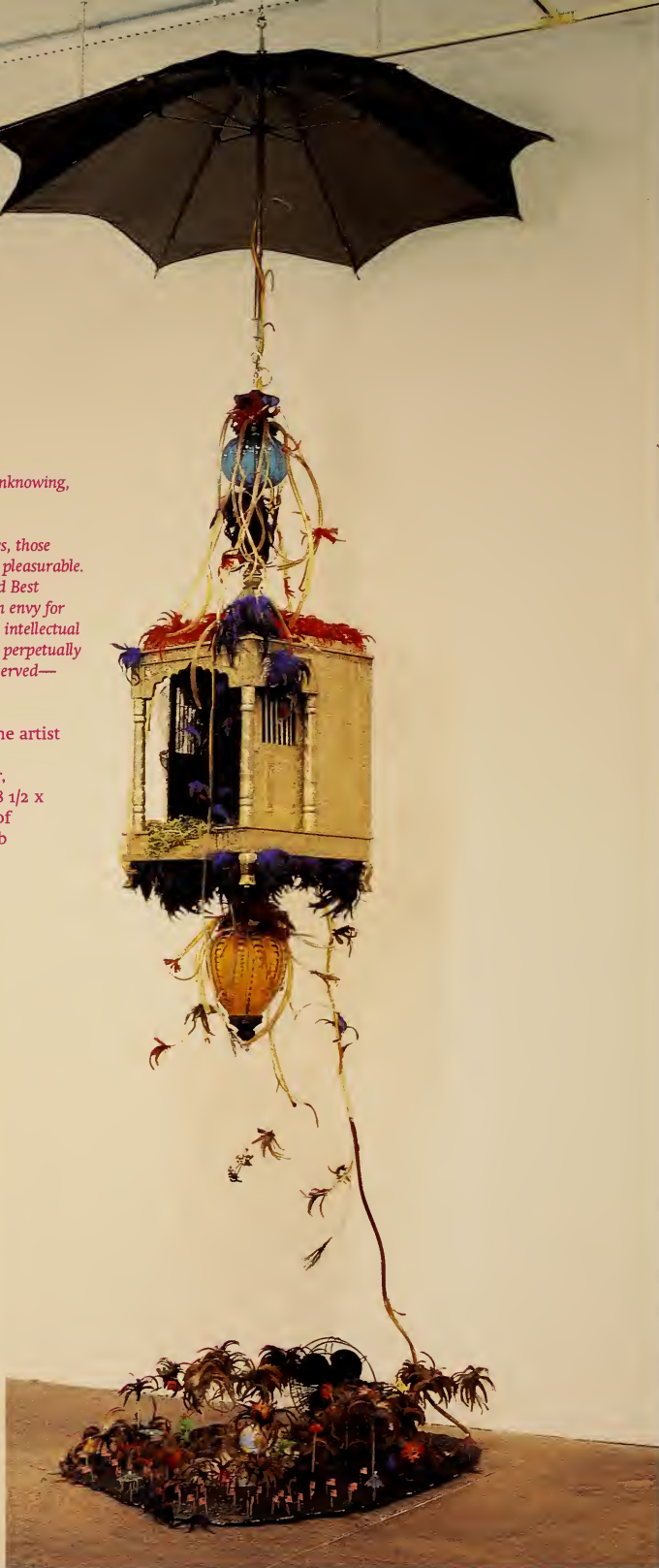
—Said one fly to the other fly

Upon close consideration, surely, one must realize that all peoples, those who have made themselves remote and unyielding, are not at all pleasurable. Many of us even have deep disdain for those who have infiltrated Best Island. Many of them have no relation to us expecting a common envy for what they cannot be. We are not responsible for bringing moral, intellectual and physical light into the recesses of their unfortunate cultures, perpetually struggling for existence. Finally extinction of these beings is deserved—justified by our sensible order.

—Said the other fly,

2002. Mixed media, dimensions variable. Collection of the artist on

Donald Lipski, *Water Lilies #61*, 1991. Glass tubing, water, American flag, and metal clamps and hook, 29 11/16 x 18 1/2 x 6 1/8 in. (75.4 x 47 x 15.6 cm) overall. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of Joel M. Barish 95.252a-b



that is American; the use of the flag in art is often intended as a display of self-criticality, celebrated as a part of the national character. The flag can also symbolize the established political agenda—the nation’s violent assimilation of all. This makes what is in fact American imperialism appear as growth and light, a natural interruption. The idea is this: all places represented as barren desire our farming, all that is forested requires our cutting, weeding, grooming.

Donald Lipski’s *Water Lilies* #61 is one in a series of his sculptures that incorporates the American flag. Lipski’s assemblages belong to a moment in our aesthetic history that gave ordinary objects legitimacy in art spaces. His flag—submerged in preservatives behind heavy glass, protected and secured, hung up on a hook never to dry—seems silenced by the weight of its serene and simple security. Displaced from its original function, its ambivalence renders it potent. I am deeply interested in this transformation—its latency, its elusive character. My work plays off these potentialities: a recombination of objects that results in a new thing, while remaining connected to what it once was. It is an exemplary metaphor for how people adapt their identities to something new while retaining a sense of their original selves—and for the way people are accepted while still being perceived as Other.

My piece is the symbolic representation of the Best Island—our island—blowing away. The contraption, which is bulky and awkward, also resonates as a mirage, an oasis—yet not the mythic idea of that safe, perfect space. It is a metaphor for the nation: contained, colorful, and ordered, but always on the brink of bursting at the seams.

Susan Graham Charles Ray

The Charles Ray piece I have chosen has an air of introspection: the sculpture is of the artist himself, tiny and nonconfrontational, unlike the other Ray pieces I am familiar with. The figure is isolated in the bottle, shoulders slightly hunched, looking ahead contemplatively. The pity one might feel toward the man trapped in the bottle, though, is mediated for me by the title “Puzzle Bottle,” which refers to the ship-in-the-bottle trickery of the piece.

I told a friend I was thinking about how the figure sees the world from the bottle. She said, “Do you know the quote from Hamlet—the one about the universe in a nutshell?” She couldn’t remember the quote, except “If I were bound in a nutshell...” and something about infinite space.¹ That conversation drew me to start the outer-space images and to start thinking more about limited or unlimited space. By the time I actually got the quote, I knew what I wanted it to say, or what I wanted it to mean, so I roughly paraphrased it to suit my needs. This version became the title of my piece.

My impulse was to make images of what the man envisions to be outside the bottle. Considering his contained state, I imagined the most escapist fantasies. I made photos of space exploration vehicles, satellites, skies, and such simultaneously with films, sometimes shooting the same scenes in both mediums.

The humor of Ray’s work, the scale, and the loneliness of the man’s situation inspired me to make the films just a little bit funny or awkward. I see an inverse relationship between the way *Puzzle Bottle* and my photos and films use scale. For his piece, Ray made a miniature of himself and limited its space by containing it in the bottle, emphasizing its smallness. For my photos and films, I made miniatures out of sugar and provided vast suggested skies and landscapes for them, creating uncertainty as to their real size. Both uses of scale create tension between reality and unreality. They ask the viewer to engage in a suspension of disbelief: to believe that there is a Lilliputian man who might fit through the neck of the bottle—or possibly just grew there—and to believe that the miniatures or the spaces they inhabit might actually be real.

1. “Oh God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams,” from *Hamlet*, ed. Louis B. Wright and Virginia A. LaMar (New York: Washington Square Press, 1958), 2.2.270–72.



Susan Graham, *a universe with edges would be alright if only I didn't dream (sugar spaceships)*, 2002. Mixed media, dimensions variable. Collection of the artist on

Charles Ray, *Puzzle Bottle*, 1995. Glass, painted wood, and cork, 13 3/8 x 3 3/4 x 3 3/4 in. (34 x 9.5 x 9.5 cm) overall. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase, with funds from the Contemporary Painting and Sculpture Committee and Barbara and Eugene Schwartz 95.85a-b





Ryan Humphrey, *Humphrey Industries Product Boxes and Humphrey Industries T-Shirts*, 2002. Water-based enamel and silkscreen ink on wood, and silk-screened T-shirts, dimensions variable. Collection of the artist; courtesy Caren Golden Fine Art, New York

Tom Sachs, *Deluxe Dueling Set*, 1997. Painted wood case with tools and objects, 19 1/2 x 24 x 18 1/2 in. (49.5 x 61 x 47 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase, with funds from Emily Fisher Landau 98.57a-ccc



Ryan Humphrey Tom Sachs

Tom Sachs's work appeals to me for a certain youthful aesthetic, an energy level that resonates at a higher pitch, which I also strive for. Some of the appeal is his process—he's got the hands-on, jury-rigged, punk aesthetic.

Tom did one piece titled after a pro-skateboarder, who only a small group of people would recognize or relate to. I'm interested in that: how I can talk to a particular group, a subculture or smaller community, yet not be exclusive. Similarly, I'm looking to see how many things I can combine that overlap and mesh, such that people from different groups can see the work and have something to talk about together, creating a more expansive vision for all of them.

My frustration with the marketing machine and the branding of everything is the impetus for all of this. People are being sold. It's all a trick. Tom addresses this issue in his work overall, if not specifically in this piece—though more aggressively and cynically than I do. I started Humphrey Industries as a personal antidote to the barrage of consumer information we live with.¹ In a way I know I contribute to the system, but my work is also a way of circumventing or appropriating it. I don't create my products or the consumer transaction on a mass scale; it's a kind of healing, recreating in an intimate way something I find disturbing. I'm after a more personal relationship with the people I give my products to; I'm trying to give a vibe, a feeling, a kind of gift.

I'm interested in uplifting, even spiritual feelings in my work, but not in an ironic way. People get uncomfortable when they find themselves driving along and tapping their fingers to a Journey song. But it is what it is, there's something pure there to just *like*. I'm asking the viewer—maybe through that recognition of the songs, or the objects or images I use—to question their experience with culture. But I want it feel familiar: you recognize and relate to my objects in a direct way.

I decided to work with a professional designer for the graphic in *Humphrey Industries Product Boxes*. There's a particular touch that comes with that rigor and expertise. I want them to feel like real products, though it's important that they are in fact only implied. I didn't want to be too specific—I like the feeling of implied doom.

The T-shirt is something else, a kind of cost-effective way to make a print. I cut and paste, touch it up, do the low-tech punk thing—that's right in line with how Tom works. I want to convey the same feeling as more traditional “art,” but on a basic level: everyone gets the idea of an image on a T-shirt. Sometimes I sell them, sometimes give them away as a kind of exchange. It may cost me money to give them away, but that's the kind of transaction I'm interested in. That's the spirit in which I made this piece. If you purchase something from me I guarantee you'll at least get a handshake.

—Drawn from a taped interview with the artist, March 1, 2002

1. Ryan Humphrey created his fictional enterprise, Humphrey Industries, as a way to address issues of consumerism in contemporary culture, and to subvert the traditional corporate exchange.

Larry Krone → Mike Kelley

When I first looked at the collection I looked quickly for things I liked, then again for things that I felt personal about. Mike Kelley was somebody who made a big impact on me at a crucial time in my education, and this piece did influence my work and the way I think about art. As I considered using the Kelley, I realized that I was focusing on a particular idea I'd had in my head: a show-stopping performance with my sister on a swing, wearing an elaborate handmade dress as her costume.

More Love Hours (no charge) uses found objects and plays on their histories. The first history is that of the materials used to make the dress and the swing; there is a story in each used and discarded element. The other, more important history is that of my sister. I'm using my sister and the found materials in a way similar to how Kelley used the dolls to create the afghan—taking advantage of these layers of history as they come into play in the work as a whole.

Using song lyrics, elements of showmanship, and obsessive handcraftsmanship, I create scenarios in my work in which people can imagine who I am, whether or not it is true. In reality, the performer is in control of the show and reveals as much as he wants. With me it's in a generous way; my “trick” is that my performances are completely sincere. Janet is doing the same thing: playing a part, yet presenting herself as herself. She has the chance to display herself and the complexities of her life



through the lyrics of the song, a kind of epic, country-music narrative—her history. While not the artist, she has the opportunity that artists have to expose herself. The point of the piece is to give her that opportunity, and in that way to expose my relationship with her—our history—as well.

Unlike many people, I think the Kelley is beautiful. My attitude toward his piece is different even from the artist's. He has a pessimistic view of the term "love hours." He focuses on the idea that a craft item is often a gift of no monetary value, but the payment hoped for is measured in love and guilt. There is something cruel in the exchange. But the most important thing I see in the work, besides the formal and the aesthetic aspects, is the amazing concentration of labor and love—both in the found elements themselves and the work Kelley put in. That to me seems like a gift he is giving to the audience.

The feeling of making a gift drives me to create things in an obsessive way. The performance with my sister is the same kind of feeling—that labor for her, making her look beautiful. I've only recently realized how refined costume-making is; her dress is actually a very couture garment. I want people to be surprised by the detail, that every element is extravagantly worked. This type of detail is unnecessary for the look of it; it's what makes it a gift.

—Drawn from an interview with the artist, February 25, 2002



Larry Krone, *More Love Hours (no charge)*, 2002. Mixed media, dimensions variable. Collection of the artist on

Mike Kelley, *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid and The Wages of Sin*, 1987. Stuffed fabric toys and afghans on canvas with dried corn; wax candles on wood and metal base, 90 x 119 1/4 x 5 in. (228.6 x 302.9 x 12.7 cm) plus candles and base. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase, with funds from the Painting and Sculpture Committee 89.13a-e

WHITNEY



Susan Graham, *a universe with edges would be alright if only I didn't dream (sugar spaceships)*, 2002 (detail)

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